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Epistemic Normativity and Cognitive Agency

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Abstract

On the assumption that genuinely normative demands concern things connected in some way to our agency, i.e. what we exercise in doing things with or for reasons, epistemologists face an important question: are there genuine epistemic norms governing belief, and if so where in the vicinity of belief are we to find the requisite cognitive agency? Extant accounts of cognitive agency tend to focus on belief itself or the event of belief-formation to answer this question, to the exclusion of the *activity* of maintaining a system of beliefs. This paper argues that a full account of epistemic normativity will need to make sense of this activity as a core locus of cognitive agency. This idea is used to motivate the conclusion that one important and often overlooked kind of epistemic norms is the kind of norms governing the various cognitive activities by which we check, sustain, and adjust our belief systems.

1 Introduction

Genuine normative demands concern things over which we can exercise our agency and so things connected to the distinctively rational activity of agents. Genuine norms are rules capable of guiding us in doing things, the sorts of things we do with or for reasons. Or so, at least, I think it is often assumed by philosophers, and I will mostly assume this here.¹

This conception of the link between genuine norms and agency is most natural for practical norms governing human *action*, where we seem to exercise something

¹Though see the beginning of sec. 5 for qualifications about this assumption. In making it for most of the paper, however, I still recognize that we also use the term ‘norm’ to refer to standards for ranking things and statistical regularities, both of which can fall short of “rules capable of guiding us in doing things.” It is notoriously difficult to characterize precisely the intuitive difference between a “mere” standard or regularity and a “genuine” or “robust” norm. In my view, it probably has something to do with connections to categorical ‘ought’s, “genuine” reasons, or final value. But, beyond saying that, I’m going to have to leave the distinction intuitive here. Note also that I’m using the phrase “doing things” in a broader way than the term “action” is typically used in philosophy.

like an ability to autonomously choose what we do (at least in good cases). But how does it apply in the epistemic domain, where there appear to be norms governing *belief* but the presence of autonomous choice is much more controversial? Some epistemologists seem to think that it doesn't apply: rules of belief aren't "genuine" normative demands since belief is generally the automatic product of the cognitive mechanisms we find ourselves with rather than something within the realm of autonomous choice. In contrast, other epistemologists insist that even if belief is mostly automatic there are cognitive acts such as deliberation and judgment within the purview of human agency, and this is where "genuine" epistemic norms get a grip on us.

The goal of this paper is to motivate a more complex account of the locus of cognitive agency than is allowed for by these two common standpoints. More specifically, I'll argue that insufficient attention in this debate has been given to the *activity* of belief-system maintenance (by contrast to the state of belief itself or the various cognitive acts sometimes related to belief-formation). The view I'll defend here is not that *all* of cognitive agency is located in the activity of belief-system maintenance but that, when thinking about genuine normative demands in the epistemic sphere, we won't achieve a satisfying account until we recognize the centrality of the activity of belief-system maintenance, and that by doing so we'll be in a better position to appreciate an important and distinctive kind of epistemic norm having to do with cognitive activities.

When it comes to the epistemic domain, conceiving of "genuine" norms as rules capable of guiding the activity of rational agents might seem to encourage the traditional Cartesian² picture, which treats believing as very much action-like. Since at least Hume, however, many epistemologists have been skeptical of this picture.³ As W. P. Alston (1988) famously argued, with the prospect of some reward, in the normal case one can *just* perform a basic action such as raising one's arm "at will." And one can also voluntarily perform non-basic actions such as turning on a light (which one does, say, by raising one's arm and flicking the switch). But when it comes to belief, with the prospect of some (potentially very large) reward, one cannot, it seems, "just" believe, e.g., that the number of stars is even. Because of this intuitive difference Alston suggests that beliefs are not voluntarily chosen: rather, they seem to come upon us unwilling whenever our perceptual and cognitive faculties are engaged. Alston recognizes, of course, that we can voluntarily choose to perform actions that have predictable effects on our beliefs, but according to him the believing itself is typically outside of the realm of autonomous choice.⁴

²In this paper I will use the names of historical figures to distinguish different views about cognitive agency as a helpful mnemonic rather than historical scholarship.

³See *inter alia* Williams (1973), W. P. Alston (1988), Plantinga (1993), Adler (2002), Levy (2007).

⁴For dissent see *inter alia* Ginet (1985), Ryan (2003), and McCormick (2015). As far as the aims of this paper go, it doesn't matter whether there are *some* beliefs over which we exercise enough control to count as autonomously choosing what to believe. As long as that's not the normal case or even as long there remain important domains of belief (e.g., perceptual beliefs) that don't count as autonomously chosen, the lessons about cognitive agency I want to draw

From this Alston eventually⁵ draws the radical conclusion that epistemologists are simply wrong to be concerned with epistemic normativity, at least insofar as this is manifested in robustly normative notions such as *ought* and *justified*, which he claims have their proper place in the evaluation of autonomous *actions*—not automatically formed beliefs. Although agreeing with the spirit of Alston’s conclusion, many philosophers today would, I think, have no problem with a weaker kind of evaluation concerned with the proper functioning of various systems, especially physiological systems including belief-forming systems.⁶ After all, there seem to be lots of things one *ought* to do that aren’t autonomous actions, such as sleep at night, digest food, startle at sudden noises, maintain healthy blood pressure, etc. So we might say that these aren’t “genuinely” normative ‘ought’s (and so don’t presuppose the ‘can’ of autonomous control) but are rather normative in the weak sense of being standards for assessing the proper functioning of physiological systems.

This suggests a broadly *Humean* picture of doxastic “agency” that goes naturally with reliabilism: what epistemologists should be concerned with is not a distinctively epistemic species of “genuine” normativity, conceived as making demands of us regarding things over which we exercise agency, but rather the less robust (and supposedly less problematic from a naturalistic point of view) sort of “norms” conceived of as the standards by which we evaluate proper functioning of one of our physiological systems: belief-forming mechanisms.

In spite of its attractions, however, many epistemologists have felt that something is missing from the Humean-*cum*-reliabilist picture. For although there are many relatively automatic cognitive processes by which we come to have sundry mundane beliefs, in some of the philosophically most interesting cases, we seem capable of doing something ordinarily called “making up one’s mind.” That is, much like we might weigh reasons for/against some action and then autonomously decide what to do, it seems that we *sometimes* weigh reasons for/against some belief and then autonomously decide whether to embrace it.

For this and other reasons, recent epistemology has been fruitfully exploring the middle ground between the extremes of the Cartesian and Humean pictures of cognitive agency, and this has motivated important reconsideration of the range

below will hold true. For my part, I doubt that belief is the right sort of thing to be conceived of as autonomously chosen, though I think there are lots of mental acts and activities which we do autonomously choose; and many of these have close connections to belief.

⁵In W. Alston (1988), he draws the conclusion that it is wrong to cash out justification in deontic terms, but later in Alston (2005) he argues that epistemologists should abandon focus on justification altogether. See Chrisman (2007) for further discussion.

⁶Also, it’s worth noting that the category of things for which we are *responsible* plausibly extends beyond the category of autonomous action. As Smith (2005) notes, forgetting a friend’s birthday is something one could be responsible for though it is not an autonomously chosen action. So, I think Weatherson (2008) is right to consider other cases of things we are responsible that aren’t autonomous actions as models for our responsibilities vis-a-vis belief. Here, however, my main concern is more metaphysical: where in the vicinity of belief do we exercise agency? Hence I will mostly bracket vexed questions about the scope of our responsibility for our mental states.

of epistemic norms. This is borne out in discussions of, e.g., epistemic virtues, normativism about the nature of belief, pragmatic encroachment, the justificatory status of testimony, the aim of belief, the notions of epistemic autonomy and epistemic justice. Nevertheless, I suspect the common conception of epistemic normativity and the kinds of agency it presupposes remains impoverished. So here I want to begin to develop an alternative; this is based mainly on the idea that the metaphysical categorization of the object of normative evaluation is crucial for understanding the role of agency in conforming to the relevant norm. By “metaphysical categorization,” I have in mind the classic typology of situations deriving from Aristotle and developed more explicitly by Vendler (1957) and Mourelatos (1978). See Figure 1.⁷

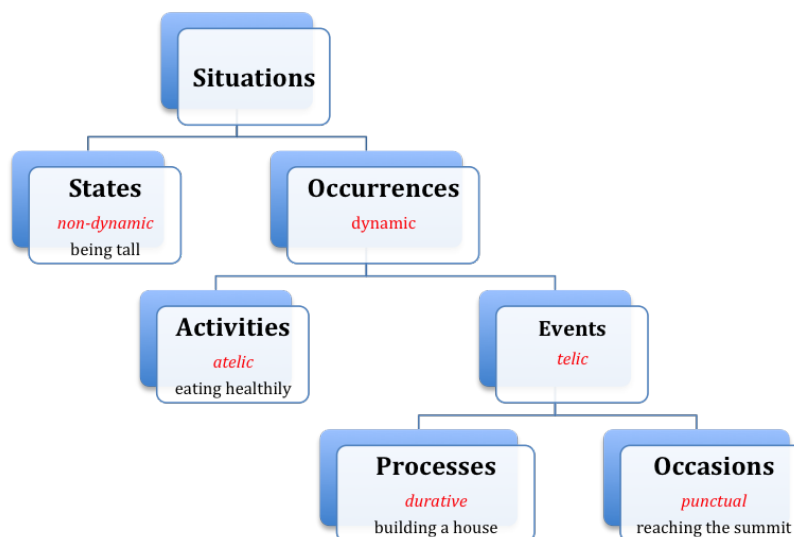


Figure 1: Vendler/Mourelatos Typology

In what follows, I shall use this typology to diagnose what I see as missteps in some recent attempts to locate agency in the vicinity of belief and to motivate an alternative proposal. In brief, what I want to suggest is that we won’t fully understand the sort of agency presupposed by epistemic normativity until we countenance cognitive states, processes, occasions, *and* activities, each of which is subject to different kinds of epistemic norms and related to agency in different ways.

⁷Compare also Rothstein (2004, 6), though she uses slightly different terminology. The precise names of the various categories on the right hand side this figure are somewhat arbitrary and different authors have preferred slightly different terminology. What’s important is not the names but how features such as dynamism, telicity, and durativity divide up the terrain of possible situations. What is dynamic involves change over or at a time. What is telic involves direction towards an endpoint or aim. What is durative takes time.

2 The Process View

Several authors⁸ have recently suggested that while believing is not action in the sense of being something we actively do, there are active and autonomous processes that can be intimately related to it, and we should locate cognitive agency in such processes. Although these authors differ in the way they spell out this idea, the basic thought is that believing *P* (or, more generally, being in a doxastic state) is not an action but it is sometimes a predictable outcome of a important sort of mental action whereby cognitive agency can be exercised. A prime candidate is *deliberating about and judging whether P is the case*.⁹

We can capture this line of thought more explicitly in what I will call the

Basic Argument:

1. Cognitive agency is exercised either in believing *P* or in the process of deliberating about and judging whether *P* is the case.
2. Any exercise of agency must be active.¹⁰
3. Believing *P* is a state.
4. So believing *P* is not active.
5. So believing *P* cannot itself be an exercise of agency.
6. Hence, cognitive agency is exercised in the process of deliberating about and judging whether *P* is the case.¹¹

What is important for my purposes here is that the process view initially looks like it might be a good compromise between the Cartesian and Humean pictures of cognitive agency. Endorsing it would allow us to agree with Alston that we don't exercise cognitive agency in belief itself, and perhaps many of our beliefs are automatic (e.g., in the way perceptual beliefs seem to be). So the only kinds of "norms" applying to belief itself could be the standards of proper functioning. But we could also go on and insist that there is an epistemically relevant kind of action involving direct exercise of what might legitimately called "cognitive agency" in deliberation towards a judgment whether *P* is the case. So a more robust sort of "genuine" normativity can still apply in the cognitive domain, *pace* Alston.

⁸Although they don't all put it in exactly this way, I think the following can be read as proposing something in this general neighborhood: Peacocke (1998), Shah and Velleman (2005), Soteriou (2005), Peacocke (2009), Cassam (2010), and McHugh (2013). Soteriou (2013 ch. 14-15) develops a much richer conception of mental agency that includes both processes of belief formation and various activities connected to thinking. Although his concern isn't specifically epistemic normativity, this conception of mental agency is congenial to the account I sketch below.

⁹We might similarly say *investigating and determining whether to believe P* or *weighing the evidence for and against P* and *making up one's mind about P's truth*. For brevity's sake, I'm going to focus here on the formulation in the main text, but I don't think anything hangs on this choice.

¹⁰Not in the strong sense that it requires an act of will but in the weak sense that it dynamically involves change.

¹¹Compare Boyle (2011) who criticizes the resulting view, which he calls the "Process Theory."

Hence, the process view accords with the Humean picture insofar as it refrains from treating *believing P* as an action one chooses to perform as opposed to a state one can be caused to be in (more or less reliably responsive to reasons and perhaps often automatically). However, it also leaves room for the Cartesian idea that we sometimes perform an action rightly called *making up one's mind* whereby we directly exercise agency in an autonomous mental action that results in a belief. This would mean that while there are of course standards by which we can evaluate the physiological systems that are belief-forming mechanisms, e.g., in terms of the reliability of their product, there might also be “genuine” epistemic normativity: norms governing deliberation towards and judgment as to whether P is the case. By implicitly focusing on different nodes of the typology of displayed above, the Humean (focused on cognitive *states*) and the Cartesian (focused on cognitive *events*) might both be correct, just about different things.

That would be a convenient détente. Unfortunately, there are at least two reasons for skepticism about the process view and the resulting view of epistemic normativity.¹²

First, such bifurcation without a unifying explanation looks ad hoc. To be sure, the Humean picture looks best when we focus on immediate beliefs about our own perceived environment and the Cartesian picture looks best when we focus on explicit deliberation, weighing our evidence, and deciding a verdict on a difficult case. But does this mean we should be irenic and say that both are correct but about different things? I think we should certainly recognize different kinds of norms applying to different kinds of things, but I will stress this diversity below in order to thematize the challenge of explaining what all of these norms have in common such that they are properly thought of as *epistemic*.

Second, the process view seems to conceive of our agency with respect to normal beliefs as *extrinsic*.¹³ Much like we might think *having short hair* is not something one does but rather a predictable effect of something one can do, on the process view, *believing P* is treated not as something one does but as a predictable effect of something one can do. Surely, however, beliefs formed in this way is a very special case rather than the paradigm of agency in the vicinity of belief. Of course, different philosophers are going to have different views about how common it is to form a belief through deliberation and judgment. However, even if this is fairly common (which I doubt), it doesn't seem that being sensitive to an epistemic norm could generally be a matter of knowing that you ought to believe P and so deliberating and judging that P in the expectation that you will thereby come to believe P. As W. P. Alston (1988) already stressed, we are only very rarely in a situation where believing some specific proposition P is a predictable effect of something we can autonomously do.¹⁴ Usually, these are “Pascalian”

¹²These are not, it is worth noting, skepticism of the more radical sort discussed by Boghossian (2008) about the very intelligibility of following rules in deliberation.

¹³Compare Boyle (2011, 6) for essentially the same point.

¹⁴For similar points, though they ultimately draw drastically competing lessons about the role of agency in mentality, see O'Shaughnessy (2000, 28) and Strawson (2003, 235).

situations where one comes to believe something (that one perhaps takes to be practically useful to believe) by submitting to some kind of indoctrination. By contrast, normal deliberation doesn't have predictable effects such as believing *that it's raining*; usually the best we can predict is that we will form some doxastic attitude or other about the question under deliberation. Moreover, as Feldman (2001) argues, there are other states (e.g., wanting ice-cream or being worried) that might be predictable effects of deliberation about particular topics (e.g., flavors of ice-cream or climate change); but we don't think of ourselves as exercising agency in conforming to these norms simply because we end up in such states.

Ultimately I want to agree that the relation between actions we autonomously perform and believing as we epistemically ought to believe is indirect in the sense that believing is not itself one of these actions but rather sometimes an effect of them. However, by focusing solely on the process of deliberating and (the occasion? of) judging, the process view cannot explain the relationship between this and norms governing belief. If I ought to have short hair, then there's pretty clearly some action I ought to perform: get a haircut. By contrast, if I ought to believe P, it is not always the case that I ought to deliberate about whether P is the case, and it is often unclear what action I ought to perform.¹⁵ In sum, we should recognize the good point process theorists make, viz. that there are cognitive processes whereby we seem to exercise agency. However, our cognitive agency does not seem to be wholly or even mainly located in these processes. In what follows, I want to consider an alternative view that promises to locate agency in each and every belief insofar as it aims at the truth.

3 The Performance View

As part of a developing view too rich to do full justice to here, Sosa (2007; 2009; 2011) makes the influential suggestion that "Belief is a kind of performance, which attains one level of success if it is true (or accurate), a second level if it is competent (or adroit), and a third if its truth manifests the believer's competence (or it is apt)" (2011, 1).¹⁶ That is only the first "level" of the sort of belief that Sosa thinks reflective agents are capable of manifesting. At higher levels, on Sosa's view, the belief-performances of the first level should also be aptly endorsed and fully so, in order to count as full human knowledge. These complexities are important to understanding Sosa's full account of human

¹⁵Note, this is not to object that the process view fails to make sense of our being free with respect to our beliefs or of our being appropriately held responsible for them. See McCormick (2011), Steup (2012), and McHugh (2014) for arguments that even if our agency isn't involved in belief as it is in action, we nonetheless count as free with respect to and responsible for what we believe in the normal case. See Booth (2014) for a response. Whatever we say about the freedom we exercise over our beliefs, we need some explanation of the way believing as we should relates to exercising our cognitive agency as we should.

¹⁶See also Greco (2004; 2010) for an influential view in the same general vicinity.

cognition and knowledge, but they won't matter here as Sosa treats beliefs all levels of belief as a kind of *performance*. And this is why I think his suggestion might be viewed as offering an alternative to the process theorists' attempts to locate cognitive agency within the wide middle ground between Cartesian and Humean pictures. For, if we follow his suggestion that belief itself is a performance, then we needn't retreat to the seemingly rare action-like processes of deliberation and judgment to find cognitive agency's relation to beliefs. Sosa's thought is that *all* beliefs, as it is so often put, "aim at the truth"; and when they succeed, this performance can be normatively evaluated for adroitness and aptness, regardless of whether it is action-like. On Sosa's view, adroitness of a performance requires it to be the manifestation of a cognitive virtue, and aptness requires the success of the performance to be due to its adroitness. He thinks that this structure of what he calls "performance normativity" applies as much to autonomous action such as shooting an arrow as it does to more automatic things we do such as flinching or feeling compassion for those in need.

In terms of the Basic Argument, Sosa's picture suggests we should reject

3. Believing P is a state.

and instead view belief as a performance, allowing us to fit it amongst the processes (dynamic, telic, and durative) in the typology displayed above. If we do that, the performance view can continue to hold that belief is not an instance of autonomous action (with Humeans and against Cartesians), while simultaneously moving one firm step away from Humeans by assimilating belief to other performances manifesting virtues and subject to genuine normative evaluation. As Aristotle stressed long ago, many performances are best done precisely when they are so habituated that they become automatic. However, that doesn't mean that they cannot be governed by "genuine" norms in the fully robust sense alluded to above of rules guiding us in doing things, the sorts of things we do with or for reasons. Moreover, if belief itself is a performance and this is a locus of cognitive agency, we won't face the worry raised for the process view above that it locates cognitive agency in a too rarified and extrinsic place to make sense of genuine norms of belief.

Unfortunately, there's a big problem with the performance theory: it is not very plausible to treat beliefs as performances (and remember that the main attraction of the performance view over the process view in this context is that *all* beliefs end up counting as performances and so become liable to the sorts of normative assessments appropriate for performances). To make the pedantic and obvious point: philosophers standardly talk about *states* of belief not *performances* of believing, and this appears to be no mere façon de parler.¹⁷ There's considerable utility in thinking of the mind as embodying various enduring and stable states,

¹⁷It is not, of course, obvious how to understand the difference between states and performances, but I think Steward (1997) is definitely right that it has been a mistake to neglect this difference in philosophy of mind and epistemology, and once we get clearer about the difference some theories become very hard even to formulate sensibly. See Chrisman (2012) for further discussion of difficulties with the performance view arising from this metaphysical observation.

having information in the hard drive, so to speak, even when it is not actively being utilized. Combined with a conception of *desires* as being states with a different and interlocking functional role, we have a very powerful model for predicting what agents of various stripes will do and interpreting what agents are doing or have done—one that seems to work even when these agents aren’t dynamically seeking a telos of truth, as the performance view of belief would seem to require.

In response to this pedantic point, a defender of the performance view might suggest that beliefs could still count as “performances” in some broad sense even though they are states because they admit of evaluation as accurate (true), adroit (competently formed), and apt (true because competently formed). Alternatively, one might concede that belief itself is not a performance but argue that it is still telic because it has truth as its constitutive aim.¹⁸ And since belief is telic, even if it is not a performance, it can still be normatively evaluated along the lines of performances, i.e. as accurate, adroit, and apt.

However, when we think about the metaphysical categorization carefully, in spite of the popularity of the slogan that belief aims at the truth, I think it is highly unclear what it would mean for a *state* of belief itself to count as adroitly pursuing its aim. Moreover, states are by definition atelic, so it is highly unclear what it could mean for some state to achieve an end. Instead it seems to me to be believers or their belief-forming mechanisms that are potentially skilful and successful in achieving ends—not the states resulting from such pursuit. That’s not to say that there’s nothing right about the slogan that belief aims at the truth, but whatever’s right in that slogan doesn’t seem to be sufficient to make states of belief telic in the way performances are; so I think the fact that “belief aims at truth” in some metaphoric sense isn’t enough to warrant thinking of belief as a “performance” in some broad sense or applying the categories of performance normativity to belief itself.

A more fruitful maneuver, I suspect, would be for a proponent of the performance view to allow that beliefs are states rather than performances but to insist that all beliefs must be formed somehow and then to argue that belief *formation* is plausibly viewed as a performance.¹⁹ We might grant that not all (or even many) beliefs are formed by explicit deliberation and conscious judgment. But they must be formed somehow, and so there must be a process of belief-formation for each belief; and that process can be evaluated qua performance, i.e. for adroitness, accuracy, and aptness. Accordingly, one might try to locate cognitive agency in belief formation which is a performance, and then epistemic norms can

¹⁸Thanks here to Ram Neta. See also Sosa (2015, 67). He makes something like this suggestion as part of a very sophisticated account of the place of freedom and activity in the mind (see especially ch. 9), which is too rich to engage with fully here. See Chrisman (2010) for further thoughts on truth as the constitutive aim of belief, which I think provides a standard for evaluating belief rather than a goal believers should be conceived as pursuing.

¹⁹See Ho (2016) for a response along these lines. See also Turri (unpublished) for further useful discussion of performance normativity, including an application to processes of belief-formation rather than beliefs themselves.

be thought to attach primarily to this performance in the way characteristic of performance normativity. Sometimes this performance may be a case of cognitive action as with belief formation through explicit deliberation, but other times it may not be full-blooded action but nevertheless active. Either way, we'd now have something active rather than stative—a *doing*—for “genuine” epistemic norms to attach to. We might dub this the *reformed performance view*.

I think the reformed performance view is partially right, and I want to retain what's right about it in the account of cognitive agency I go on to develop below. However, I think it is reasonable to worry that it leaves something very important out of the picture. It's a core part of ordinary epistemic practice to evaluate beliefs not just (or even mainly) for how they were formed but also for how they continue to fit with a believer's overall system of beliefs.²⁰ Indeed, often we'll have little idea of how someone originally came to believe P; and what we'll be interested in, when using epistemic norms to evaluate them, is whether their *continuing* to believe P is defensible, reasonable, or rational. By being in that belief state, are they in the state they ought to be in? This is a manifestly different question from the question: by forming that belief, did they do something they ought to have done? There may be something rightly called “cognitive agency” presupposed by both questions, but they are different phenomena and the reformed performance view as I have sketched it so far seems to me to miss the sort of cognitive agency presupposed by the former question. I think this problem is actually the source of the temptation in Sosa's original suggestion that belief *itself* is a performance. For, if that were correct, then in the here-and-now belief itself would be something active and potentially agential. But if the performance theorist reforms the view to focus instead on the performance of forming the belief, he trades down the cognitive agency apparently attaching to the here-and-now belief for cognitive agency attaching to the historical performance of formation of the belief.

Returning to the diagnostic typology, I think this means that the pressing question is where to locate this elusive here-and-now cognitive agency and how it relates to the norms we apply to beliefs (as something separate from the norms we apply to the formation of these beliefs). In what follows, I consider a different kind of view also inspired by Aristotle that locates the relevant cognitive agency in the belief state itself.

4 The Active State View

Like me, Boyle is also critical of the process view and for reasons that seem to extend to the reformed performance view. He writes, “We might say that, according to the process view, our agency can get no nearer to our beliefs than to touch them at their edges. I want to suggest that this leaves our agency standing

²⁰Compare Soteriou (2013, 356).

in a too-extrinsic relation to the condition of belief itself” (2011, 6).²¹ So he argues that beliefs themselves normally involve the active exercise of agency. He writes: “The fact that believing that P is not something one does in this sense does not rule out that believing that P is *itself* an exercise of agency, if there can be such a thing as an exercise of agency that does not take the form of an occurrent process or event.” (2011, 16, emphasis added)²² As an alternative, he suggests that we need to recognize a form of agency, “whose exercise [does not] consist in actively changing things to produce a certain result, but in actively being a certain way” (2011, 19). He thinks we get this in Aristotle’s distinction between *kinēsis* and *energeia*.

As Boyle glosses this distinction, *kinēsis* is an “actualization of something’s capacity to change in respect of place, quality, or quantity. . . . Any such change, Aristotle holds, proceeds from something to something: there is a condition from which it starts and a result toward which it proceeds” (2011, 19). For instance, Aristotle gives examples like *becoming thin* and *learning something*. Because of this change, *kinēsis* involves a sort of incompleteness: “while a *kinēsis* is occurring, the relevant change has not yet reached the result towards which it is proceeding, and when the result is reached, the *kinēsis* itself is no longer extant” (2011, 19–20). By contrast, *energeia* is “an actualization of a capacity ‘in which the end is present’: one whose existence does not consist in the unfolding of a process towards a certain result, but rather in a moment of the completion of this activity” (2011, 20). Aristotle uses examples like *understanding*, *being happy*. These are actualizations of a capacity, where the actualization is, so to speak, complete at every moment of their occurrence. (2011, 20)

Given this distinction, Boyle suggests we take

...the condition of belief *itself* to be an actualization of [one’s] capacity for doxastic self-determination, even when the subject does not have some specific ground for holding the belief in question. For even if a person has no specific ground for a given belief, still her holding this belief will involve her *being persuaded* that it is true and thus correct to believe. (2011, 22, emphasis added)

In light of the classic typology of situations canvassed above, one might feel incredulous: *states* which are themselves *acts*? As Audi writes, “To believe is not to do something or to change anything; nor does having a belief over time entail changing over the time in question in any way related to the belief. Beliefs, then, are not actions” (2001, 101).²³ But Boyle sees things differently: “So we can say, in general, that a rational subject’s believing what she does is itself her enduring act of holding it true.” (2011, 22) That is, Boyle is suggesting that

²¹He also argues that the process view has counterintuitive implications regarding the way our knowledge is “transparent” to rational reflection on what is the case. (See Moran (2001; 2003).) I won’t discuss this fascinating argument here as it doesn’t directly affect the main point I want to make about epistemic normativity and cognitive agency.

²²Compare also Boyle (2009).

²³See also Bach (1981, 355–57).

believing P is itself “an ‘energetic’ *act* of rational self-determination.” (2011, 23, emphasis added) So, in terms of the Basic Argument, Boyle appears to accept:

1. Cognitive agency is exercised either in believing P or in the process of deliberating about and judging whether P is the case.
2. Any exercise of agency must be active.
3. Believing P is a state.

But he rejects the inference from 3 to:

4. So believing P is not active.

by positing “active states.”

This view is Aristotelian in a different way than Sosa’s performance view. Both allow that believing is not itself intentional action but rather the generally automatic—though active—manifestation of one’s intellectual character. But Boyle treats the belief states themselves as active (even if typically automatic) in such a way that one can claim responsibility for them, and thereby count as self-determined in the way characteristic of autonomy.

If that attractive middle ground is tenable, we’d get genuinely epistemic norms applying more broadly than the seemingly rare process of deliberation and judgment, but we wouldn’t have to say that beliefs themselves are performances rather than states: they’re “active states.” This suggests that whenever we take ourselves to be autonomous with respect to manifestations of our intellectual character, we might find epistemic norms in application. These may not be “norms” in the sense of rules we explicitly follow in acting, but they may still be “norms” in the sense that being subject to them is partially constitutive of actively and rationally doing something in believing. While such an exercise of intellectual character may be a different kind of agency than what’s involved in paradigmatic actions, the idea would be that it still underwrites the application of genuine epistemic norms to most (or all) beliefs *pace* Alston. For, according to Boyle, beliefs—at least as they are relevant for epistemic evaluation of rational beings—are active. It’s just that they’re not process-/event-like; instead they’re a special kind of state which is itself active.

In my opinion, the active state view makes much better sense of the breadth of normative evaluation of people’s belief states than the process view. It also provides an account of the here-and-now agency seemingly presupposed by many normative evaluations of beliefs, which was missing in the reformed performance view. Nevertheless, there are two things about the active state view that trouble me to the point of worrying that this obscures the true complexity in cognitive agency.

First, we shouldn’t demur at placing things into stipulated categories such as *kinēsis* and *energeia* in whatever way suits one’s theoretical purposes (and, to be clear, I think Aristotle’s terminology marks a philosophically important distinction). However, by also using ordinary language to refer to things that go in those categories, one is at risk of importing alternative and incompatible

criteria implicit in the use of terms such as “state” and “activity.” Boyle concedes “that we will not accept ‘I believe that P’ as an answer to ‘What are you doing?’” (2011, 16). But he seems to think this is an unfortunate quirk of the English term “belief” rather than a hint about how we tacitly conceive of beliefs when we use this term. He continues, “. . . but that is merely because the formulation of the question here demands an answer in a continuous tense, and ‘to believe’ is a stative verb that is not ascribed in the continuous tense” (2011, 16). However, as the typology of situations canvassed above suggests, one contrast that seems to be fairly central to our ordinary conception of states is between what’s *stative* and what’s *dynamic*.²⁴ This is what I take to be manifested in the aspectual distinctions available for the words we use to speak about things that are stative and dynamic. This is why, I’d suggest, verb phrases describing paradigmatically dynamic things such as *to run* or *to climb the stairs* admit of the progressive *-ing* form, whereas verb phrases describing paradigmatically stative things such as *to have long hair* or *to desire tea* do not typically admit of the progressive.²⁵

So, it is not only a standard assumption in epistemology and the philosophy of mind that beliefs are states of mind, this assumption is implicit in our use of this verb. Boyle suggests that “[t]he fact that believing that P is not something one does in this sense [i.e. answering to ‘What are you doing?’] does not rule out that believing that P is itself an exercise of agency, if there can be such a thing as an exercise of agency that does not take the form of an occurrent process or event.” (2011, 16) I agree that there are exercises of agency that do not take the form of an occurrent process or event, but I do not think they can be states (that’s why I’ll suggest later that they are activities). For it seems to be implicit in ordinary use of this word in English that what it is referring to is stative, even if nearby concepts such as deliberating, manifesting intellectual character, applying concepts to objects, and making up one’s mind are all about something dynamic.²⁶ On the assumption that an *exercise* of agency must be active, and whatever is active is dynamic rather than static, this means that belief itself cannot be both a state and an exercise of cognitive agency.

So it seems to me that, in talking about “active states,” Boyle is either tacitly

²⁴Cf. Comrie (1976 ch. 1), Brinton (2009 ch. 1).

²⁵Although it doesn’t matter for the argument I go on to give, it is important to note that the distinctions in verbal aspect I’m appealing to are semantic not grammatical. The distinction between verbs that do and don’t admit of transformation into the grammatical progressive is idiolect-relative and historically contingent, which makes it an imperfect guide to the semantic distinction between verbs that describe something dynamic and verbs that describe something stative. For instance, standard English deploys the progressive with verbs used to describe states considered somehow temporary, e.g., “The statue is standing in the driveway.”

²⁶Setiya (2013) makes a similar point. Could Boyle in response retreat to a rejection of (2) instead of (3) of the Basic Argument? That is, could he argue that not all exercises of agency are dynamic? My response to this maneuver would be more of a confused stare than an objection. But I’ll report that I have a very hard time making sense of the idea that something non-dynamic could itself count as *exercising* agency, except in some metaphorical or derivative sense.

changing the focus to activities²⁷ that are necessary for (but not identical to) being in a belief state, or appealing to an ad hoc metaphysical category²⁸ in a way that obscures rather than explains how we exercise agency with respect to our belief states.²⁹

Perhaps I am placing too much weight on Boyle’s suggestion that there are “states which are acts”; even if we reject this rhetoric perhaps we should still recognize a distinction between the “energetic” states that are themselves “enduring” actualizations or manifestations of our human capacities, and so in that sense active—e.g., being happy, being in love, etc.—and “kinetic” processes that have a non-energetic state as their endpoint—e.g., getting a haircut, digesting food. Even so (and this is my second reason for doubting the active state view’s ability to explain the agency presupposed by epistemic normativity), conceiving of belief as an “energetic” state within this schema doesn’t really explain why we normatively evaluate our beliefs themselves in addition to the processes by which we get into these states. For there are physiological states such as being pregnant or being addicted to heroin that might similarly be said to be “enduring” actualizations or manifestations of human capacities rather than “kinetic” processes. But, as I stressed when discussing the austere Humean picture of cognitive agency, the idea of epistemic normativity seems to presuppose that we are more agentive with respect to our beliefs than with respect to these sorts of (merely?) physiological “energetic” states. So being “energetic” rather than the result of a “kinetic” process cannot by itself explain the apparently distinctive (and so far elusive) kind of cognitive agency implicated in epistemic normativity.³⁰

²⁷For what it’s worth, my suspicion is that Aristotle’s category of *energeia* is better conceived as within the typological category of *activity* (dynamic so not state-like, but atelic so not event-like). And I could imagine a version of Boyle’s view that finds a distinctive kind of cognitive agency in the activity of maintaining beliefs instead of the state of belief. This would move rather close to the view I go on to endorse below.

²⁸Not *completely* ad hoc—we do talk about things being in a “state of flux” or finding someone in a “frenzied state.” I’m unsure what to say about these locutions. They seem to be bad models for states such as belief which can be entirely tacit or dispositional; however, these may also provide good examples of states that can be identified only via the activities which constitutively manifest them.

²⁹Perhaps Boyle should instead insist that, in spite of philosophical orthodoxy and linguistic custom, the verb *believes* refers to something that isn’t really a state. For example, Miracchi (2015, 30) suggests that all mental states are actually activities of some sort. Or maybe Boyle should be read as proposing to change our way of speaking and thinking so as to treat *believe* as an activity verb rather than a state verb. Either of these ways of defending Boyle would involve radically revisionary claims about the metaphysics of mind and/or ordinary language—claims which would have to be evaluated by comparing the theoretical and practical usefulness of our current metaphysics and ordinary language to the suggested alternative. I don’t think this is actually what Boyle has in mind, and I’m not going to discuss further here the possibility of giving up on the orthodoxy that belief is a mental state. (I argue for the orthodoxy Chrisman (2012).)

³⁰Although it would take me too far afield to defend this adequately here, I think this also undermines the idea that it is something about “taking ownership” of our beliefs that makes them active or agentive in a way that other physiological states are not. For one can “take ownership” of being pregnant or addicted to heroin, thereby endorsing these states and viewing them as an expression of one’s character.

So, in the end, I think Boyle’s active state view nicely has the here-and-now agency presupposed by epistemic normativity clearly in view, and that makes his view of cognitive agency better than the other views we’ve so far considered. However, I don’t think the active state view correctly characterizes cognitive agency and this is mainly because it leaves out cognitive *activities* (or smuggles them under the awkward guise of “active states”).

5 Diagnosis and Alternative Account of Cognitive Agency

On the assumption that genuine norm guidance presupposes the ability to exercise of some kind of agency connected to the object of normative evaluation, and given the very natural assumption that the exercise of agency is active, it is tempting to attempt to locate cognitive agency in processes and occasions nearby belief—things such as deliberation, belief-formation, and judgment—for these are obviously *active* at least in the sense of being *dynamic*. When we appreciate, however, that the norms applying to these things pull apart in important ways from the paradigmatic sorts of epistemic norms applying to beliefs, it becomes tempting to try to make belief itself out to be active in some way—either to argue that it is really a performance not a state, or to argue that it is a special sort of state which is itself active. But, if my argument above is on the right track, these suggestions end up either not working or leaving out something important about cognitive agency.

As a result, we might want to abandon the assumption that “genuine” norm governance presupposes an ability to exercise agency, at least in the epistemic sphere. For my part, I think there’s something importantly right about the idea that the norms of belief are norms saying how something should *be* rather than what someone should actively *do*.³¹ Nevertheless, I think there’s a kind of agency intimately connected to belief, and we’d do well to consider it more carefully. This comes into better view when we look more carefully at the other metaphysical category from above that we haven’t yet discussed in any detail: activities. As they are classified in the Vendler/Mourelatos typology, activities are dynamic but atelic, meaning that they involve change but lack an internally determined endpoint. For example, *eating healthily* and *keeping the weeds down* are things that involve change, but this change is not directed at some external result but rather part of the continual realization of the activity itself.

We’ve already considered the cognitive state of belief, the cognitive events of belief formation (including by deliberation) and judgment; are there also cognitive activities that the normative epistemologist should take seriously? Surely there

³¹See Chrisman (2008) where I bring this distinction to bear on the question of doxastic involuntarism.

are many, but it will be useful in what follows to focus on the various activities plausibly collected together under the heading of *maintaining a system of beliefs*.

What is involved in maintaining a system of beliefs? As the verb phrase suggests, it is dynamic rather than static. Maintaining something (e.g., a flowerbed) can be a reasonable answer to the question “What are you doing?” Moreover, the activity of maintaining something is spread out in time like a process, but unlike a process it is atelic, i.e. lacking an internally determined endpoint. More specifically, as I am thinking of it, maintaining a system of beliefs involves examining and adjusting existing beliefs in light of newly acquired beliefs or propositions assumed to be true for various purposes (e.g., by raising or lowering one’s credence in the old beliefs, or by reconceiving the inferential/evidential relations between beliefs if they seem to be in tension under various suppositions). It can also involve seeking out new beliefs—e.g., by investigation or deliberation—when one’s system of beliefs leaves some important question open or some strongly held belief apparently unsupported by other beliefs. However, maintaining a system of beliefs in these ways doesn’t always have to involve consciously or actively performing specific cognitive acts of reasoning or investigation. Plausibly maintaining a system of beliefs should be understood, in part, in terms of counterfactual relations to potential intensifiers and defeaters of one’s beliefs. That is, one can count as maintaining a system of beliefs because *if* one were to encounter evidence for/against one of its element beliefs, one would up/downgrade one’s confidence in its truth.

In these ways, maintaining may require various acts but there needn’t be a specific act which constitutes maintaining. Indeed, as with flowerbeds, maintaining may require no active attention for stretches of time. One can actively form what is then maintained, or one could simply find oneself with something and then maintain it. One might count as actively maintaining a state (e.g., of having a weed-free flowerbed) for some period only because one is disposed to perform various actions (pulling weeds) should certain events occur (weeds sprout out of control).³²

So, in the notion of maintaining a system of beliefs, I think we might find something active (in the sense of being dynamic) that deserves consideration as a further locus of cognitive agency. That is to say that, unlike all of the views we have considered above, I think we should reject (from the Basic Argument):

1. Cognitive agency is exercised either in believing P or in the process of deliberating about and judging whether P is the case.

³²Unlike flowerbed maintenance, however, belief-system maintenance seems to me to be essentially social in beings like us. Although inter-personal evaluations of correctness can apply to garden configurations, arguably it’s not part of the nature or point of gardens to be susceptible to these evaluations. By contrast, I suspect it is part of the nature and point of belief-systems like ours to be susceptible to inter-personal evaluations. Compare Goldman (1999), Mercier and Sperber (2011) for congenial accounts of the social role of human knowledge and reasoning. I suspect it is something about this difference that makes it more natural to normatively evaluate someone’s belief states themselves than to normatively evaluate one’s garden arrangements themselves.

In my view, it is simply a false choice to think cognitive agency might be exercised only in the state of belief itself or in the events and occasions involved in deliberating about, judging, and forming a belief whether *P* is the case—for it might (also) be exercised in the activity of maintaining a system of beliefs.³³

To be clear, I am not proposing to reject the idea that one exercises various kinds of cognitive agency in events of belief formation (including by deliberation) and judgment; rather I am proposing to add to it the idea that we exercise a different kind of agency in the activity of belief-system maintenance, and this kind of agency is crucial to understanding the way that genuine epistemic normativity presupposes cognitive agency.

Along these lines, we might then think of beliefs as dispositional states constitutively connected to occasions of judgment, processes of belief formation, and activities of belief-system maintenance. More precisely, one's believing *P* might be thought of as a disposition to judge *P* should the question arise, a disposition one can acquire in several ways including but not limited to deliberating about whether *P* is the case. This state will be intimately connected to these other dynamic things in two ways. First, it will have causal effects (some actual and some counterfactual) on things like whether one's level of belief in other propositions is intensified, sustained, or diminished in the course of maintaining one's overall system of belief as one acquires more beliefs (through perception, deliberation, and however else one acquires beliefs).³⁴ So one will be engaged in the activity of belief system maintenance insofar as newly formed beliefs have causal effects on the strength of one's dispositions to make judgments regarding inferentially related content. Second, our best way of attributing and identifying particular beliefs will often (even always?) be through the activities and actions that manifest this state; these will include linguistic actions such as asserting, implicating, and presupposing a belief, but also nonlinguistic activities such as generally living one's life in a way that makes sense only assuming the truth of the believed proposition.³⁵ So one might be identified as engaged in the

³³Compare Nolfi (2013) for an account of how normative judgment about what oneself ought to believe might plausibly be involved in belief-system regulation.

³⁴Although I'm inclined to draw the line differently from Audi (1994), I think this conception of belief is consistent with the distinction he draws between dispositional beliefs and dispositions to believe. There are dispositions to judge that are, so to speak, fully present in one's cognitive economy (e.g., one already has all of the composite concepts, and one's behavior can be straightforwardly rationalized by appeal to these beliefs). And there are further dispositions to acquire dispositions to judge, which are less fully present in one's cognitive economy (e.g., one might need to develop further conceptual resources before one could judge, and it is more difficult to rationalize one's behavior by appeal to these further dispositions).

³⁵Although he is focused on knowledge rather than belief, Hetherington (2012, 83–85) argues that states of knowledge are constituted by the ability to be manifested in various forms of activities. Similarly, I suspect the constitutivist route provides a way to make sense of what Rohrbaugh (2015) calls “inner achievements” like sobriety and marriage, which seem to me to involve both states and activities constitutively related. However, as far as the account in this paper goes, I think one might back off the metaphysical claims of constitution and instead insist on conceptual claims about what one who attributes belief (and knowledge) is committed to in virtue of our concepts of these things and our concepts of the various actions and activities intimately related to them.

activity of maintaining a system of beliefs to the extent that one engages in other activities and actions that make sense only in light of one's (often tacit) weighing and reweighing the evidence one has for and against various beliefs that make a practical difference, as well as one's (often tacit) pursuit of new evidence for and against one's beliefs. One's cognitive agency does not merely touch one's beliefs at their front edges, it holds them all round and constitutes their membership in one's cognitive economy.

This more complex account of cognitive agency avoids the ad hoc bifurcation into Cartesian and Humean cases we witnessed in the process view: on my picture, all beliefs, whether actively formed or automatically acquired, can be treated as more or less central parts of one's belief system. Hence, if cognitive agency is exercised (at least partially) in maintaining systems of belief, we avoid ad hoc bifurcation, and cognitive agency remains intrinsic to beliefs. This approach also makes sense of the possibility of agential involvement in passively acquired beliefs without rejecting the orthodox categorization of belief as a state or positing active states. In my view, beliefs not acquired through explicit deliberation can still cohere with other beliefs in one's belief system, and so be actively maintained as part of maintaining that system. Much of this may happen through relatively automatic processes of Bayesian updating, but the activity of maintaining a belief system will also involve less automatic cognitive action such as seeking and considering new evidence, reflecting on the consequences of presently conscious beliefs, explicitly learning new concepts, etc.

Hence, in the search for a more nuanced account of cognitive agency than we get from the Cartesian and Humean pictures, I've agreed with Boyle and Sosa that the process theorists are wrong to locate cognitive agency solely in the process of deliberation and judgment whether P is the case. It's not that such processes and occasions do not involve agency, but whatever kind of agency is presupposed by our practice of applying epistemic norms to beliefs, it seems to apply to beliefs outside of the arguably small subset to which we have actively deliberated. However, I have also argued that Sosa's and Boyle's alternatives involve suspect metaphysics of mind, which we can avoid by taking into account the full range of the typology of situations. By recognizing the importance of cognitive *activities*, such as maintaining a system of beliefs, we make more intelligible space for the exercise of agency over most of our beliefs, and hence we retain (against Alston) the possibility of "genuine" epistemic normativity.

A natural response to my suggestion here is that it is not *so* different from the other views I have considered. Perhaps, for example, a defender of the performance view will think that she can easily incorporate cognitive activities alongside cognitive performances in her overall account of cognitive agency; then maybe we'd just need to update the name of the view to the performance-and-activity view. Or, similarly, a defender of the active state view might think that beliefs count as "active states" precisely because they are partially constituted by their connection to the activity of belief system maintenance in something like the way that I have suggested. The devil is in the details of course, but I'd

welcome such company as long as it doesn't require us to conceive of beliefs as something other than cognitive states or to reject the conception of states as themselves stative rather than dynamic.

6 Conclusion

As I see things, one of the key payoffs of the picture of cognitive agency sketched above is that it allows us to distinguish four different kinds of 'ought's plausibly thought to be interrelated in the superstructure of epistemic normativity:

- 'ought's about occasions (punctual, telic), e.g., what one ought to judge.
- 'ought's about processes (durative, telic), e.g., how one ought to deliberate, or otherwise form a belief.
- 'ought's about activities (durative, atelic), e.g., how one ought to maintain a system of beliefs.
- 'ought's about states (non-dynamic), e.g., what one ought to believe.

Are any of these 'ought's more basic to normative epistemology? I'm more concerned here to distinguish various kinds of subtly different norms in order to advance our understanding of each of them than to propose a particular account of their interrelations. But, from a traditionalist perspective,³⁶ it is natural to think epistemology is first and foremost (or by definition) concerned with the kinds of norms relevant to knowledge, and these are norms governing states of belief—for knowledge requires believing as one ought to. Of course, those state-norms are (in beings like us) plausibly tightly related (either by constitution or conceptual entailment) to norms governing the activity of maintaining systems of beliefs.³⁷ At least, it seems that, for every belief (state) which is a candidate for human knowledge, we might say that there is an activity of maintaining it as part of maintaining the believer's overall system of beliefs. For these reasons it is natural to see norms governing cognitive states and activities as most central to epistemology (without taking any particular stance on which if either is more fundamental).[[^]wright]

³⁶Compare Baehr (2011, ch. 1). Not that I'd impugn recent more liberal expansions of epistemology to include, e.g., focus on understanding, whose relation to these different types of norms will be interestingly different.

³⁷Some philosophers of mind have argued that the activity of thinking is *ontologically* more basic than the events of particular cognitive acts. For example, Ewing writes, "With cognition . . . we should distinguish a continuous process of thinking from particular 'cognitive acts'. The former should . . . be regarded as basic rather than the latter, and the process of thinking out a problem should not be reduced to a mere series of such acts" (1948, 217). (See also Soteriou (2013 ch. 10-14) for a congenial discussion of the role the *activity* of thinking plays in understanding the agency involved in particular *events* of thinking a thought.) My suggestion here is neutral on the ontological basicness of mental activities vs. mental events, but if Ewing's view is correct, that is a further ontological reason to think a mental activity such as maintaining a system of beliefs is a core locus of cognitive agency. And it would be unsurprising if epistemic norms attach to this in a way that is not reducible to the way they attach to mental events and states.

By contrast, although very relevant to certain epistemological topics, consciously deliberation and judgment seem to me to be somewhat rare phenomena compared to believing and maintaining systems of belief. Someone can rationally believe something even this belief wasn't reached through explicit deliberation or judgment, indeed such beliefs can count as knowledge if other conditions hold. (Think of all of the tacit knowledge we have.) Nevertheless, except in pathological cases, for any belief *P* that is part of one's overall system of beliefs, one is disposed to judge *P* if the question arises, and one can both deliberate from this judgment to other judgments and call this judgment into question thereby instigating deliberation as to whether *P* is the case. Even if one isn't actually deliberating and judging, the fact that one would is a central part of what I think it is to count as actively maintaining the system of beliefs of which this is a part. And such activity is, I've been suggesting, a central kind of cognitive agency presupposed by "genuine" epistemic norms.

In this fashion, we might think that epistemic norms are first and foremost neither a species of action norms as the Cartesian picture presupposes nor mere standards proper physiological functioning, as the Humean picture encourages. Rather, they are most fundamentally state-norms that have tight constitutive or conceptual ties to activity-norms that are, in effect, webs of conditional process-norms where the processes are the diverse processes relevant to acquiring, storing, and transmitting useful information. If we think of the sphere of cognitive agency and epistemic normativity in this more complex way, we avoid the false Cartesian idea that we exercise voluntary control *in* believing like we do *in* acting. Yet we can also allow that there are things we ought to believe, where these 'ought's aren't mere standards of proper functioning but "genuine" norms presupposing the existence of cognitive agency. Moreover, this picture makes room for norms of deliberation and norms of judgment, with no clear analog for merely physiological processes. That means, on my view, there can be acts of "making up one's mind." It's just that for me these are treated as less central than norms of belief to what I conceive of as the project of normative epistemology. On my picture, cognitive agency is both extrinsic and intrinsic to belief, which forces a more complicated account of the kinds of norms properly called "epistemic."

In this paper, I've been concerned to show how the metaphysical categorization of the object of normative evaluation provides an illuminating way to think about the nature of epistemic norms and their connection to cognitive agency. In my view, belief is not itself an exercise agency, since it is not dynamic. However, that doesn't mean that there are no "genuine" norms of belief or that belief isn't closely connected to cognitive agency. Many states are subject to state-norms, which evaluate the legitimacy of something's being in the state. Some of these (e.g., the ones evaluating beliefs), are constitutively or conceptually connected to norms governing activities (e.g., maintaining belief systems), processes (e.g., deliberation and belief formation), and occasions (e.g., judging).

By distinguishing these, the project of tracing their subtle connections promises a more illuminating account of the kind of agency presupposed by the possibility

of genuinely epistemic normativity. Here, I've only taken the space to gesture at some of the connections in order to demonstrate that the middle ground between the Cartesian and Humean pictures is more complex than commonly thought. The process view and the performance view focus too much on cognitive processes; the active state view wrongly seeks to locate exercise of cognitive agency in the state of belief itself. I've been concerned to argue that we need a more complex account which includes all of the various cognitive elements (states, processes, occurrences, and activities) and the norms they are subject to. I was initially inclined to think cognitive activities are of central importance because it seemed to me to be truer to the phenomenology of epistemic norm governance as this is imperfectly reflected in the language we use to talk about epistemic matters. But I also think this more complex picture, which gives pride of place to the cognitive activity of belief system maintenance, is ultimately going to be crucial to making sense of ourselves as believers in a distributed information-managing community, especially as imperfect information-storing beings with diverse perspectives on the world. Hence, rather than asking what are the rules of belief, I think we should ask about the various normative standards whose application to our beliefs, maintenance of belief systems, belief formation (including by deliberation), and judgment is what makes all of these things integrated parts of human cognition in our essentially social environment.³⁸

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